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ABSTRACT

Project IMPACT, a joint effort by public and private schools in Grand Forks (ND) to provide services to gifted elementary students, is described. Four project objectives are identified: to combine educational resources of public and private schools; to provide workshops and resources for teachers; to identify teachers suitable for teaching minicourses to gifted children; and to identify gifted children and provide a set of unique learning experiences. Fifty children were identified for the pilot project. Community involvement is recounted, and project costs are reviewed. Results of four evaluation instruments (the Arlin-Hills Student Attitude Inventory, the Wide Range Achievement Test, the Williams Exercise, and the Slosson Intelligence Test) are briefly noted. (CL)

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Project IMPACT

A Case Study in Gifted Education

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Abstract

Project IMPACT is a joint effort by public and private schools in Grand Forks, North Dakota to provide a wide range of services to students who are considered gifted or high potential. Designed as a multi-purpose project, four major objectives were defined.

1. To combine educational resources between public and private schools. To maximize the impact in the community.
2. To provide workshops and resources for teachers.
3. To identify teachers who could potentially impact on gifted students and facilitate instructional interaction (Mini-courses).
4. To identify gifted students and provide a set of unique learning experiences.

Evaluation of project results suggest that program design created a number of alternatives and services for the student population despite limited funding. The overall design is described in the following narrative.

Project IMPACT

A Case Study in Gifted Education

The costs and concerns of meeting Federal mandates for handicapped children has left many local school districts preoccupied with implementation needs. The continuing search for scarce resources to apply to inflated budgets leave few administrators with sufficient curiosity to investigate the educational needs of any group not mentioned in legislative dictums. The increased awareness of parents to educational rights, however, has left a growing demand for appropriate education for all segments of our population. This author's particular interests lies with the neglected segment of the gifted. Those children who, by virtue of their intelligence, creativity, and maturation, have an accelerated ability to engage in developmental activities far beyond their current age. Although not forgotten, many districts feel at a loss in trying to meet the demands of the gifted in the face of restricted dollars, declining enrollments, and federal rescriptions. Nowhere is this problem more accentuated than those areas which are termed rural. As such a state, North Dakota has been reluctant to encourage school boards into the waters of "experimentation" and "excessiveness." The result of this conservation has resulted in fewer than 3 programs (1979-80) spread throughout the state.

Project Goal

Recognizing that North Dakota was falling behind other rural states

in its efforts to meet the needs of an extremely diverse student population, the Department of Public Instruction began to entertain proposals from local school boards under Title IV-C of P.L. 93-380 to aid high ability students. The Grand Forks Public School System responded to that encouragement by submitting a proposal written by principals, Gary Mitchel and Don Heier entitled Project IMPACT: Intensive Mini-Courses to Promote Analytical and Critical Thinking in High Potential Students. The goal of the intended project was simple and direct. Broadly defined, the project was to enable high potential students to engage in educational projects which would extend and expand their abilities in critical and analytical thinking.

Traditional efforts for gifted usually entail an acceleration of traditional curriculum subjects. The focus remains the same, only the intensity is increased. Project IMPACT's approach was to increase diversity and broaden skill areas by presenting intensely motivating areas of instruction (Mini-Courses) that fall outside the realm of traditional curriculums. This diversity was intended to cause a need within the student to differentiate past experiences and to accomodate and assimilate present challenges. The result was to create a climate for the need of critical and analytical thinking, in order to meet the challenge of instructional activities where previous background of experience existed for the student. The success of this approach will be treated later in this article.

Objectives

In support of this general goal and approach, four specific objectives were identified.

1. To combine educational resources between public and private schools to maximize the impact in the community.
2. To provide workshops and resources for teachers to prepare them for the responsibility of meeting the needs of high potential students.
3. To identify teachers who could potentially impact on gifted students and arrange teaching schedules to allow for instructional interaction.
4. To identify those students of various school populations who are, by definition, high potential and provide a set of unique learning experiences.

Each objective was planned and implemented in a structured manner. The following descriptions is a brief explanation of how each objective was enacted.

Discussion

The first objective, to combine educational resources between public and private schools to maximize impact in the community, was ambitious and unique. Ambitious because joint projects between the parochial and public school sectors are not common. Usually discouraged because of possible conflicts of intended interests, this

effort made a sincere (and successful) attempt to pioneer a new working relationship. This, due to the original commitments of the planners to serve a broad and as diverse set of needs as possible.

The uniqueness of the project stems from the diverse population it serves. Grand Forks, North Dakota has been conservatively estimated at 45,000 people, most of whom represent rural interests. The Grand Forks Air Borce Base, located 16 miles west of the city, houses an additional population of 16,000 people who are not rural in nature. This combined population of 60-65,000 presents a number of administrative and instructional challenges to school staff. This unique mix serves as a constant catalyst for innovation and creativity to meet the broad range of needs and experiences represented by these two groups.

As a developmental effort, the very nature of the project suggested that a step-by-step approach be taken. For this reason, only four elementary schools were selected to provide representatives to the project. The schools used were Lewis and Clark, Roosevelt, Ben Eielson (Air Base) and St. Mary's. Students participating in the project were from grades three through six.

The second objective, to provide workshops and resources for teachers to prepare them for the responsibility of meeting the need of high potential students, enabled a broader range of services to be offered to teachers and students not directly affected by the project. Two general workshops, aimed at awareness, were implemented for the

school district as a whole. Additional workshops were offered in each participating school and with identified instructors. A total of 25 workshops were presented using the following topics for the basic format.

I. Introduction to Gifted Children - Characteristics

II. Identification

III. Case Studies: What Would You Do?

IV. Classroom Strategies

V. Teacher Concerns and Needs in Dealing with the Gifted

Throughout the course of these workshops, additional concerns and/or structures were initiated by teachers and staff of each school. Although, a complete list cannot be created to cover all topic areas that were addressed regarding the gifted, it may be summarized that a wide range of issues and concerns were generated in these workshop settings. Project staff responded to these topics by creating files and materials for specific teacher use. Traditionally an item that is paid much attention to in the way of verbal homage, but of little actual utility, these resource materials have been so successful that they are presently being considered for commercial publications.

The third objective, to identify teachers who could potentially impact on gifted students and arrange teaching schedules for instructional interaction, was the most difficult to implement. In order to provide adequate personnel for the mini-course offered in the four

schools, teacher recruitment was conducted over the entire school system. The initial survey of the school system resulted in a total of 15 teachers requesting further information about the project. The Steering Committee ultimately made nine appointments for instructors of nine mini-courses. These courses included Taxidermy, Theatre Make-Up, Governmental Systems, Family Trees and Ethnic Backgrounds, Cultured Investigations, A Walty Through Space, Indian Folklore, Logic Problems, Puzzles, Computers, and Greek Mythology. Each course was offered on Friday afternoon from 1:00 to 2:45 p.m. during the spring semester with each student allowed to participate in two mini-courses.

The use of the mini-course concept, short weekly segments of instruction, was considered to be the critical decision of the project. It enabled a number of critical components to come into being. Specifically, it allowed for a) increased numbers of children to be served, b) maintained the children within the regular classroom, c) reduced costs, d) broadened range of possible experience, e) offered individual choices, f) and increased the total of staff involved with high potential students.

These benefits were not without some costs. Complicating factors included a) arranging for substitutes for Friday afternoons for class of instructors, b) providing transportation for students, c) creating class meeting space, d) and coordinating material/supply needs. Despite such procedural activities, the cost versus benefit ratio was considered to greatly favor the benefits. More on costs will be addressed later.

Mini-course presentors were encouraged to develop performance objectives for each mini-course created. Two measures of performance was required from each instructor.

1) At the conclusion of each mini-course, each child was to have mastered 90% of the behavioral objectives that were orginally established for each course.

2) As a result of the instruction, each participant was to have created a product to demonstrate his/her ability to think analytically, critically, and/or creatively. In addition, each of the teachers initially, created a pre and post test to judge the entry/exit level of their particular students.

The fourth objective, to identify those students of various school populations who are, by definition, high potential and provide a set of unique learning experiences, was extremely challenging. The selection process for students was fairly extensive, involving several different measures. For instance, the Iowa test of Basic Skills was used as a gifted identifier, as well as the Cognitive Abilities Test, and the Lorge-Thorndike Test. In addition, teacher nominations, and subsequent folder examinations completed the screening task. The information gathered from this process was collapsed and collated and presented to members of a selection committee. Each of the four schools had such a committee that was comprized of the principal, psychologist, teachers, and the project coordinator. As a result of these procedures, 50 children were identified for participation in the pilot program.

Community Involvement

Central to the administration of Project IMPACT was the development of a Community Advisory Council. The council served in an advisory capacity to project directors and the project coordinator. In order to obtain a broad representation of the social base/makeup of the community the following interests were represented:

One Elementary Principal

Three Elementary Teachers

One Member of School District's Central Administration

One Member of the Parochial Schools

One Member from the University of North Dakota

Four Parents

One Member from Special Services

Project Directors

Project Coordinator

Three meetings throughout the year assisted the Director and Coordinator to plan and implement the initial project. The primary function was to serve as a sounding board to initial ideas, spread the "good news" and to encourage the continuation of project after State funds were exhausted.

Project Costs

Funded for a total of $20,000, the cost of Project IMPACT was considered to be minimal in relationship to its benefits. Consider the

effect of the entire Grand Forks Public School System receiving a) a major introductory workshop, b) a total of twenty additional-smaller workshops to train and prepare for gifted children, c) resource development, d) curriculum expansion, e) services to 50 gifted pupils, plus f) the first major attempt to identify gifted children in the Grand Forks School System. This effort adds up to a very creditable record for the dollars invested. The range of activities described is being continued for the second year under Title IV-C without significant increase, which hopefully shows a responsiveness to need rather than an infatuation with revenue dollars.

Evaluation Indices

In order to be responsive to evaluation needs, the Project Evaluator in concert with the Program Coordinator, initiated a number of statistical procedures/evaluation activities to report upon the progress of the program. The following instruments were initially proposed for testing during the first year.

1. The Arlin-Hills Student Attitude Inventory
2. The Wide Range Achievement Test
3. The Williams Exercise
4. Slosson Intelligence Test

The results of these tests provided a number of interesting insights into students attitudes and educational processes.

Arlin-Hills Student Inventory

The Arlin-Hills Survey of Learning Processes indicated that the parochial school differed markedly from a number of the other school responses. For instance, St. Mary's differed substantially in the following areas.

	St. Mary's	Public School
Sufficient time to help each other	yes	no
Enough chances to choose their own activities	yes	no
Enough chances to help teachers plan what their going to do	yes	no
Enough chances to move around in the classroom	yes	no
Enough chances to work with others in small groups	yes	no

All other responses were remarkably consistent and did not indicate problems or concerns in any one area. Overall, the student responses rate the preceeding items as the only critical differences. Similar responses occured in the following areas.

Too much time working at a desk (no)

Everyone works on the same thing (no)

Teacher permission required for activities (no)

Sufficient time outside class for learning (no)

Teacher talk to much (no)

Too much use of textbooks (no)

In addition to the summary of Learning Processes, the Arlin-Hills survey of Attitudes Toward Teachers was also administered. Two usual responses are worth noting from the survey. 1) St. Mary's teachers received unanimous support for "being fair, and 2) the majority of all students surveyed indicated that teachers make some students look stupid." The expected fairness of parochial teachers did prove to be true although, insensitivity to student needs continue to be a priority item for students and teachers.

Wide Range Achievement Test

The Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) was used to obtain a measure of student skills. Initially, it was predicted that each of these students would fall above the 90th percentile in each area measured. Surprisingly, this was not the case. The following table illustrates the eventual breakdown.

Insert Table I about here

These scores indicate that gifted students are showing a great deal of verbal abilities, as illustrated by the reading scores, which are an approximation of verbal abilities. Predictably, math scores are behind reading schores. Surprisingly, the extent of the difference

raises a number of serious questions. For example, are the scores indicative of student abilities or instructional approachers? Are high verbal abilities incompatible with mathematical skills? In, general, what is affecting the enormous range of differences? Although this study was not intended to answer such questions, the serendipitous findings are thought provoking.

Williams Exercise

The Williams Exercise is a test of figural creativity that was administered as a pre and post test measure for each of the students in the program. The test is composed of two major activities; Picture Construction and Picture Completion. Under each of these activities, categories of Life-Nature, Ornamental-Household, and Scientific-Mechanical are established. Scores are based upon the number and quality of responses to presented tasks. The range of gain scores was 62 points with an overall mean of 25.8. The results of this test suggest that the students were highly responsive to the mini-courses. That is, the sessions appear to have generated a greater feeling of freedom within the students as reflected by these scores.

Slosson Intelligence Test

The Slosson Intelligence Test was administered to fifteen students selected at random. The overall range of the Slosson scores was from 109-144. The overall mean was 127.47. Scores of 130 and above, which represent the top 2% of the population were obtained by 40% of the

The following table will help to visualize these scores.

Insert Table II about here

The implications of this range suggest that many factors (measurable and non-measurable) were included in student selection. Verbal abilities, creativity, socialization skills were all influencing factors.

Summary

The goal of this project was not to document the need for the gifted educational experience in a local school district. Such need is presumed for every geographical area that has an educational system. Rather, the activities of this project were intended to illustrate that services for the gifted could be provided:

1. for a large number of students,
2. with a diverse range of interests and choices provided,
3. while mainstreamed in the regular classroom
4. at a reasonable cost,
5. with inservice and curriculum materials created in support of the program, and
6. while including the private sector of education in a joint effort.

The ultimate result has been a program that has been valued by administrators and community alike. Funding has been continued and opportunity for

expansion extended. Support is always a difficult attribute to measure. It's transitory nature suggests that in the ebb and flow of expectations, the timing of optimism is critical to future investments. A record article, Project IMPACT Revisited, will be testimony to the optimism of current expectations.

Table I

		Reading	Spelling	Math
Percentage of Students in	96-100%	.66*	.34	.00
Percentage of Students in	90- 95%	.18	.12	.02
Percentage of Students in	80- 89%	.11	.14	.06
Percentage of Students in	70- 79%	.05	.13	.08
Percentage of Students below	70%	0	.27	.84
TOTAL=		100%	100%	100%

*The scores represent the percentage of students that achieved in the state percentile for their normal age group.

Table II

Intelligence Test Scores

Range of Scores	Frequency	Percent
140 - above	4	.27
130 - 139	2	.13
120 - 129	4	.27
110 - 119	4	.27
100 - 109	1	.06
	TOTAL 15	100%

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